

Message Text

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21

ACTION DPW-01

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 IO-10 DHA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 SCA-01 SCS-03 /076 W

----- 106162

P R 030728Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3598

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USMISSION GENEVA

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 22976

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UNHCR, AS, VN

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIAN RETURNEE PETER WHITLOCK

REF: STATE 256616

SUMMARY: THE AUSTRALIANS HUSTLED THEIR RETURNEE OUT OF SIGHT. HIS INCARCERATION APPEARS TO HAVE GIVEN HIM A POLITICAL EDUCATION. END SUMMARY.

1. PETER WHITLOCK, THE AUSTRALIAN WHO ARRIVED ON THE UNHCR OCTOBER 30 FLIGHT FROM HANOI (EMPLOYED AT THE SEATO-FUNDED HILLTRIBES BROADCASTING STATION IN NORTHWESTERN THAILAND AND INCARCERATED WHILE VISITING BAN ME THUOT AT AN ILL-CHOSEN TIME) WAS WELL-LIKED BY HIS FELLOW PRISONERS FOR HIS SENSE OF HUMOR, KINDNESS, AND HARDINESS. THEY RECALL HIS MAKING HIS FOURTEENTH DEMAND TO BE ALLOWED TO SEE THE AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR IN HANOI AT THE TIME OF ONE OF THEIR TWO TOURIST EXCURSIONS TO THAT CITY AND HEARING
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HIS REQUEST DENIED, TO THEIR GENERAL MERRIMENT.

2. WHITLOCK'S ARRIVAL AT THE AIRPORT HERE PROVIDED ONE OF THE MORE AMUSING EPISODES CONNECTED WITH A HAPPY OCCASION. ALLEGEDLY BECAUSE HE HAD TO MAKE A CONNECTION IN AN HOUR, THE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY PICKED UP WHITLOCK AT PLANESIDE AND WHISKED HIM OFF, ALLOWING HIM NO TIME TO RELAX, THE PRESS NO CHANCE FOR PICTURES OR INTERVIEWS, AND US NO OCCASION TO DO ANY DEBRIEFING. IT DEVELOPED THAT HE DID NOT MAKE THE CONNECTING FLIGHT AFTER ALL AND ONLY LEFT FOR HOME AT NOON THE FOLLOWING DAY. HOWEVER, AS ALAN DAWSON OF UPI NOTED, THE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY'S HASTE IN GETTING HIM OUT OF THE WAY ONLY CONFIRMED THE WORST RUMORS CIRCULATING FOR SOME TIME THAT WHITLOCK WAS SOME SORT OF INTELLIGENCE AGENT.

3. IN VIEW OF WHITLOCK'S MANY FRIENDS IN BANGKOK, ONE WOULD THINK HE WOULD HAVE CHOSEN TO STAY OVER FOR TWO OR THREE DAYS, AS DID ALMOST ALL OTHER RETURNEES. WE SUSPECT THE AUSTRALIAN ACTION WAS DESIGNED TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT HE WOULD SAY NOTHING THAT MIGHT EMBARRASS HIS COUNTRY IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE, BUT THERE MUST BE LESS OBVIOUS WAYS OF ACCOMPLISHING THE SAME OBJECTIVE.

4. INCIDENTALLY, ONE OF WHITLOCK'S FELLOW RETURNEES COMMENTED THAT WHITLOCK WAS BASICALLY AN APOLITICAL PERSON WHEN THEY FIRST MET HIM IN BAN ME THUOT. HOWEVER, AS THE IMPRISONMENT CONTINUED, HE BECAME INCREASINGLY ANTI-COMMUNIST AND CONSERVATIVE AND LEFT THEM IN BANGKOK SAYING HE WAS THINKING OF RUNNING FOR PARLIAMENT OR MAKING HIS VIEWS KNOWN IN OTHER WAYS.
WHITEHOUSE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRISONERS RELEASE, POLITICAL PRISONERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 NOV 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO22976
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750380-0815
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751182/aaaacvfn.tel
Line Count: 93
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION DPW
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 STATE 256616
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 JUL 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <03 NOV 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AUSTRALIAN RETURNEE PETER WHITLOCK
TAGS: PFOR, CASC, AS, VN, VS, UNHCR, (WHITLOCK, PETER)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006